

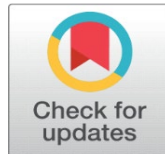
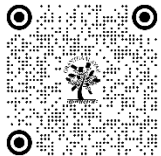
SHRI BABU JAGJIVAN RAM: A PIONEER OF DECOLONISATION MOVEMENT IN THE INDEPENDENT INDIA

Dr. Sanjiv Ranjan¹✉, Dr. Shashi Kant²✉, Dr. Pintu Kumar³✉

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Motilal Nehru College (E), University of Delhi

²Assistant Professor, Department of Political science, Motilal Nehru College (E), University of Delhi

³Associate Professor, Department of History, Motilal Nehru College (E), University of Delhi



Corresponding Author

Dr. Sanjiv Ranjan,
sanjivranjan84@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Babu Jagjivan Ram, a prominent Dalit leader and social reformer, was a pioneering force in India's decolonization movement. Born in 1908 in a marginalized caste community, he overcame systemic discrimination and rose to become one of the most influential political figures in post-independence India. His journey from a humble background to a statesman symbolizes the resilience and determination of the oppressed classes in the fight for equality and social justice.

Jagjivan Ram's role in India's freedom struggle was marked by his commitment to eradicating caste-based injustices while fighting for the country's independence. As a member of the Indian National Congress, he played a crucial part in the Quit India Movement and led efforts to ensure that the voices of Dalits and other marginalized communities were included in the national discourse. He was also instrumental in forming the All-India Depressed Classes League, which advocated for the political and social rights of Dalits.

After India gained independence in 1947, Jagjivan Ram continued to champion the cause of the downtrodden as a key member of independent India's government. He held several important cabinet positions, including that of Defence Minister and Agriculture Minister. His contribution to the Green Revolution, which transformed India's agricultural landscape, is particularly noteworthy. His leadership during the Indo-Pak war of 1971, which led to the creation of Bangladesh, further cemented his legacy as a visionary leader. Beyond politics, Jagjivan Ram's life was a testament to the power of perseverance and the importance of inclusivity in nation-building. He dedicated his life to creating an India free of both colonial oppression and caste discrimination. His legacy continues to inspire movements for equality and justice in modern India.

Keywords: Social Justice, Decolonization, Social Reformer, Caste Discrimination, Indian Freedom Struggle, Equality, Inclusivity

1. INTRODUCTION

Shri Babu Jagjivan Ram, popularly known as Babuji, remains a towering figure in India's post-independence history. Born on April 5, 1908, in Chandwa, village of Bihar now named Bhojpur district, Jagjivan Ram, rose to prominence as a leader of the Dalit community, a champion of social justice, and a key figure in the Indian National Congress. As a prominent leader, his contributions to the nationalist movement and his relentless advocacy for social justice have left an indelible mark on Indian society. While his role in the freedom struggle is well documented, his efforts in the decolonization of independent India—especially in the removal of colonial symbols—are often overshadowed. While remembering Jagjivan's contributions to India on his birthday our Honourable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi mentioned in his speech that Babu Jagjivan Ram was the man responsible for win in the 1971 war and agricultural revolution in India and his ultimate fight for colonial symbols and social justice celebrated as Samta Divas.

Shri Babu Jagjivan Ram said that colonial symbols ranging from architectural structures, laws, educational systems, and even social practices were a constant reminder of India's subjugation under the British rule. He understood that true independence was not just political but also psychological and cultural. Thus, for him the demand for their removal was not merely symbolic but was deeply tied to the broader struggle for national identity, self-respect, and the reassertion of India's indigenous culture.

2. EARLY LIFE AND POLITICAL STANDINGS

Born into a Dalit family, traditionally considered untouchable, his early life was marked by experiences of caste-based discrimination, which instilled in him a profound sense of injustice and a determination to fight for equality. His education, first in a local school and later at Banaras Hindu University (BHU), exposed him to nationalist ideas and the burgeoning freedom movement. His formative years saw much involvement in student politics and leadership roles wherein Jagjivan Ram developed a keen understanding of the interconnectedness of colonial oppression, caste discrimination and the movement to remove colonial symbols in independent India.

Babu Jagjivan Ram organised a Mazdoor Rally of approx. 50000 labourers in 1928 at Wellington Square and attracted the attention of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose. In 1935, he was nominated to the Bihar Legislative Council under the Government of India Act 1935 and joined the Indian National Congress. He was elected from Bihar's Sasaram parliament constituency in 1936 and continued till 1986. He went jail twice for participation in the Civil Disobedience Movement and the Quit India Movement. The Congress was the principal organization leading the fight against British rule, but it was also dominated by upper-caste leaders, and the voices of Dalits and other marginalized communities were often marginalized. Jagjivan Ram emphasized the need for an inclusive struggle that addressed both the political independence of India and the social emancipation of its oppressed communities. He was a vocal critic of the caste system and worked tirelessly to bring the issues of Dalits to the forefront of the national movement through the establishment of All India Depressed Class League.

Babu Jagjivan Ram was the Minister of Labour in the first cabinet of free India significantly changed labour policies. He was the first Indian Labour Minister to preside over the International Labour Organisation conference on 16 August 1947 in Geneva. He held several ministerial posts in Nehru's cabinet such as communications, Transport and Railways and Transport and Communications. In Indira Gandhi's government, he worked as minister for Labour, Employment and Rehabilitation and Union Minister for Food and Agriculture. In 1977, he resigned from the cabinet and formed the Congress for Democratic Party within the Janata coalition and became the Deputy Prime Minister.

3. VISION OF A DECOLONIZED INDIA

Jagjivan Ram's advocacy for social justice was closely linked to his efforts to remove colonial symbols in independent India. His vision of a decolonized India was rooted in his belief that independence was not merely about the transfer of power from the British to Indian hands but about a profound transformation of Indian society. He believed that the persistence of colonial symbols whether in the form of laws, institutions, social practices or psychological was a barrier to achieving true equality and justice, and that true freedom can only come by removal of colonial trails from all spheres.

4. DEMAND FOR REMOVAL

In the post-independence, the presence of colonial symbols in various aspects of Indian life was seen as a reminder of the country's subjugation and a hindrance to the formation of a new national identity. The remnant of the colonial legacy was vivid in architecture, legal systems, education, and practices and rituals of daily life. The demand for removing colonial symbols was pioneered by leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru however, Babu Jagjivan Ram's role in this movement was particularly significant because he brought a unique perspective to the issue. For Jagjivan Ram, the removal of colonial symbols was not just about asserting national pride but also about addressing the deep-rooted social inequalities that had been perpetuated by both colonial rule and the caste system.

5. DECOLONIZATION OF THE MIND AND SOCIAL STRUCTURES

Babu Jagjivan Ram was not just a political leader; he was a revolutionary thinker who envisioned a free India not only liberated from colonial rule but also from the oppressive social structures that had plagued the country for centuries. Born into a Dalit family in 1908, he experienced firsthand the crushing weight of the caste system. Yet, rather than succumb to it, he transformed his personal struggles into a lifelong mission to dismantle both colonial and caste-based oppression. He believed that true decolonization was incomplete unless India freed itself from internal hierarchies that marginalized millions based on their birth.

Jagjivan Ram's vision extended beyond political freedom—it encompassed the decolonization of the Indian mind and society. He argued that India's independence from British rule would be hollow if it didn't address the systemic inequalities perpetuated by the caste system. To him, freedom meant the removal of both external colonial power and internal social discrimination. His work within the Indian National Congress and through the All-India Depressed Classes League was focused on ensuring that India's future was built on the foundations of equality and justice for all its citizens, regardless of caste or background.ⁱ

As a post-independence leader, Jagjivan Ram held several key government positions, including Defence Minister and Agriculture Minister. His contribution to the Green Revolution, which transformed India into a self-sufficient agricultural power, was ground breaking. However, his work was not just about economic progress—it was about creating opportunities for the marginalized. He was instrumental in ensuring that the benefits of development reached the most vulnerable sections of society, challenging the entrenched mindset that Dalits were destined for lives of poverty and subjugation.ⁱⁱ

Babu Jagjivan Ram's legacy is a profound reminder that decolonization is not just a political act but a societal one. His life's work was aimed at breaking the mental and social chains that continued to bind India even after the British had left. His tireless fight for social justice, equality, and the upliftment of Dalits resonates in modern India, where his vision of an inclusive, egalitarian society still inspires ongoing struggles for rights and dignity.ⁱⁱⁱ

6. ECONOMIC DECOLONIZATION

The colonial loot of India's resources was not unknown to Jagjivan Ram. He understood that the British had structured the Indian economy in a way that served their interests, leaving India with a legacy of underdevelopment and economic dependence. Hence, Jagjivan Ram's vision of a decolonized India involved transforming the economy to serve the needs of its people rather than foreign powers.

While he became India's Minister of Labour and later as the Minister of Defence, Babu Jagjivan Ram implemented policies aimed at improving the living standards of the working class, agricultural self-sufficiency and sustainability (Green Revolution),^{iv} ensuring that the benefits of economic development were shared equitably. He advocated for land reforms, the promotion of indigenous industries, and the protection of workers' rights. He brought new landmark legislations such as Industrial Dispute Act 1947, Minimum Wages Act 1948, Employee State Insurance Act 1948, Labour Act 1951, Employee Provident Fund Act 1952, Mines Vocational Training Rules 1966 etc by ending previous colonial regulations.

7. CULTURAL DECOLONIZATION

Babu Jagjivan Ram firmly believed that India could not truly achieve independence without liberating itself from the cultural domination imposed during colonial rule. To him, political freedom was just one part of the equation; equally important was the restoration of India's rich and diverse cultural heritage, which had been sidelined and suppressed under the influence of Western art, education, and language.^v

Jagjivan Ram recognized that the dominance of Western forms of expression—whether through art, language, or education—was acting as a barrier to India's full cultural and social emancipation. He viewed this as a deep-rooted issue that held back the country's progress, preventing millions from reconnecting with their own history and identity.

One of his key interventions was in the revival and promotion of traditional Indian arts, crafts, and music, seeing them not just as relics of the past but as living embodiments of the nation's spirit. For instance, he focused on empowering India's weaver communities, understanding that handloom weaving was more than just a craft—it was a symbol of India's self-reliance and a source of pride for generations of artisans. Jagjivan Ram's advocacy for financial support to these communities was instrumental in revitalizing this industry.

He championed initiatives that provided weavers with financial grants and access to better raw materials, modern tools, and training in new designs. By doing so, he was bridging tradition with modernity, helping weavers enhance both the quality and the appeal of their products in a rapidly changing market. His efforts created a ripple effect: the improved products not only sparked domestic interest but also saw a surge in demand internationally, bringing Indian craftsmanship to the global stage.

At the heart of this initiative was a deep concern for the people. For millions of weavers, these policies were life-changing, enabling them to sustain their livelihoods and preserve their ancestral craft. By promoting handloom weaving, Jagjivan Ram was not just reviving an industry—he was ensuring that the stories, skills, and heritage of generations were not lost to the forces of modernization and globalization.^{vi}

Through these efforts, Jagjivan Ram sought to inspire a national consciousness that was proud of its roots, encouraging Indians to look inward for inspiration rather than outward. In reclaiming its traditional arts, India was also reclaiming its identity, a process that was as critical to decolonization as gaining political independence.

8. DECONSTRUCTING COLONIAL ARCHITECTURE

Babu Jagjivan Ram understood that true independence wasn't just about removing the British from India's political landscape; it was also about freeing the country from the lingering symbols of colonial oppression. Among the most glaring of these symbols were the monumental government buildings, statues, and public spaces designed by British architects to embody the might and grandeur of the Empire. These structures were more than just physical spaces—they were a constant reminder of the dominance and subjugation India had endured for centuries.

Jagjivan Ram saw this as a contradiction. How could a newly independent India claim its sovereignty while continuing to operate from the very buildings designed to project colonial control? To him, these structures were not just relics of the past but representations of a colonial mentality that needed to be discarded.

He argued passionately that post-independence India required a new architectural narrative, one that celebrated its rich history, diversity, and future aspirations. For him, the continued use of colonial-era buildings for government functions, or as symbols of authority, was not just impractical—it was harmful to the nation's psyche. It perpetuated a sense of subordination, subtly implying that India's newfound freedom was somehow incomplete.^{vii}

Under his influence, India began to repurpose or rename these colonial buildings, infusing them with new meaning in the context of a free nation. This transformation wasn't merely cosmetic—it was deeply symbolic of a larger effort to decolonize the nation's mindset. Buildings that once stood as emblems of foreign rule were now to be transformed into places that reflected the country's democratic ideals and cultural heritage.

For instance, many colonial-era structures were given new names that honored Indian leaders, thinkers, and historical figures, providing a sense of ownership over these spaces that had previously been designed to exclude the Indian population. This renaming and repurposing reflected a shift not just in power, but in how India saw itself in the world. What was once a monument to oppression could now be a symbol of pride and self-reliance.

But Jagjivan Ram didn't just advocate for the transformation of old structures; he also pushed for the construction of new buildings that represented the country's evolving identity. He believed that India's new architectural vision should be grounded in its own cultural traditions, using designs that reflected the country's deep spiritual roots, its arts, and its democratic principles. These new buildings would stand in contrast to the imposing colonial architecture, serving as spaces of inclusivity, progress, and hope.

Through this process, Jagjivan Ram was not just concerned with bricks and mortar—he was reimagining what India could become. He wanted the very landscape of the nation to inspire pride in its people and reflect their collective journey toward freedom. For him, architecture was more than just functional—it was a canvas on which India could project its dreams, values, and ambitions.

His vision for these transformations went beyond aesthetics. It was about creating an environment that uplifted the spirit of the Indian people, allowing them to see themselves not as inheritors of a colonial past but as active architects of their own future. This architectural decolonization was, in his mind, an essential part of India's broader quest for self-determination and dignity.

By advocating for the reshaping of India's public spaces, Jagjivan Ram played a crucial role in helping the nation step out of the shadows of colonial rule and into the light of its own sovereign identity, where every stone and structure told a story of independence, resilience, and pride.^{viii} He advocated of the renaming of the buildings and places to reflect India's new reality. The transformation of these spaces was symbolic of the larger effort to decolonize Indian society. He believed that India's new buildings should be a reflection of its cultural heritage and democratic values, rather than a reminder of its colonial past.

9. LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL DECOLONISATION

Another critical area where Babu Jagjivan Ram made significant contributions was in the legal and institutional reforms aimed at removing colonial symbols. The legal system in India, which was largely inherited from the British, contained several laws and practices that were seen as colonial relics. These included laws that were discriminatory, outdated, or inconsistent with the values of a democratic and independent nation.

As a senior leader in the government, he was a strong advocate for reviewing and repealing laws that were remnants of colonial rule. For instance, he supported efforts to abolish the practice of untouchability, which was codified in British law and reinforced social inequalities. He advocated for the inclusion of provisions^{ix} that would ensure equal opportunities for SCs and STs in education, employment, and political representation. The enactment of the Protection of Civil Rights Act in 1955, which aimed to eliminate untouchability, was a significant step in this direction.^x

10. EDUCATIONAL REFORMS AND KNOWLEDGE DECOLONIZATION

Babu Jagjivan Ram understood that colonial rule had not only taken control of India's land and resources but also colonized the minds of its people. Nowhere was this more evident than in the British educational system, which was deliberately designed to produce a class of Indians who were loyal to the colonial administration. The system emphasized rote learning, discipline, and servitude rather than fostering creativity, critical thinking, or a sense of pride in India's own rich intellectual and cultural traditions. For Jagjivan Ram, this was one of the most insidious aspects of colonialism, and he was determined to change it.

He saw education as a powerful tool for both oppression and liberation. In the hands of the British, it had been used to create a compliant class of bureaucrats and clerks, disconnected from their roots, but in a free India, Jagjivan Ram envisioned education as a means of empowerment—an instrument for decolonizing the mind. He believed that a true education should teach students not just to serve the state but to question it, to think independently, and to engage critically with the world around them.^{xi}

One of his primary goals was to reorient the Indian education system to reflect the country's own heritage. He advocated for the inclusion of indigenous Indian languages in schools and universities, recognizing that language was a powerful vehicle for thought and culture. By teaching children in their native tongues, he believed they would be better able to connect with their own histories, traditions, and communities, instead of being alienated by a foreign language and culture.^{xii}

Jagjivan Ram also championed the inclusion of Indian history, philosophy, and literature in the curriculum, arguing that students should be exposed to the intellectual wealth of their own civilization. For too long, colonial education had painted a picture of India as a backward, uncivilized country in need of Western intervention and enlightenment. Jagjivan Ram wanted future generations to understand that India had its own intellectual traditions, spanning thousands of years, from which they could draw both wisdom and pride.

At the same time, he was not opposed to Western knowledge, but he believed it should be taught alongside Indian knowledge systems, not in place of them. He advocated for a balanced education that combined the best of both worlds—where Western science and technology could be embraced but not at the expense of indigenous knowledge. He understood that India needed to advance in science and industry to compete on the global stage, but he wanted this progress to be rooted in a uniquely Indian context.

Jagjivan Ram's vision for education extended beyond curriculum reform. He was also a staunch advocate for policies that would ensure access to education for all, especially for marginalized communities. He supported reservation policies for Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and other disadvantaged groups, recognizing that centuries of social and economic oppression had left these communities far behind in educational attainment. He believed that without affirmative action, the gaps in education and opportunity would only widen, perpetuating cycles of poverty and exclusion.^{xiii}

Furthermore, he was a passionate advocate for women's education. He understood that empowering women through education would not only uplift families and communities but also transform society at large. He pushed for scholarships, financial aid, and other support mechanisms to help girls and women access education, knowing that their inclusion in schools and universities would be key to India's progress.

In addition to formal education, Jagjivan Ram recognized the importance of technical and vocational training. He believed that not everyone needed to follow the path of academia, and that practical skills were equally valuable. By promoting technical and vocational education, he sought to create opportunities for young people to learn trades and crafts, ensuring that they could contribute meaningfully to the economy while also sustaining India's traditional industries and crafts.^{xiv}

For Jagjivan Ram, all of these educational reforms—whether linguistic, curricular, or policy-based—were part of a larger vision of creating a society that was free from the vestiges of colonialism and firmly rooted in its own cultural and intellectual traditions. He believed that through education, India could produce a new generation of thinkers, leaders, and citizens who were proud of their heritage and capable of charting their own course in the world.

His commitment to decolonizing knowledge wasn't just about reclaiming the past—it was about shaping the future. He wanted to ensure that every Indian, regardless of their caste, gender, or background, had the opportunity to learn, grow, and contribute to building a truly independent and self-sufficient nation. In his eyes, education was the foundation upon which a free India would stand, and through his tireless efforts, he helped lay the groundwork for a system that would serve the needs of all its people, not just a privileged few.^{xv}

11. THE NEW NATIONAL IDENTITY

Jagjivan Ram's vision of a decolonized India was inherently inclusive. He believed that the removal of colonial symbols and the decolonization of society should lead to the creation of a national identity that embraced all of India's diverse communities in an egalitarian manner and one which is rooted in India's cultural heritage. He was particularly concerned that the interests of marginalized groups, such as Dalits, tribal communities, and religious minorities, were to be fully

represented in the new India This identity, he argued, should be free from the influence of colonialism and reflective of the country's diversity and democratic values.

One of the ways in which Jagjivan Ram sought to promote this national identity was by encouraging the use of Indian languages instead of the English which was the dominant language in government, education, and the media and was a colonial hangover that needed to be addressed. While he recognized the practical advantages of English, he argued that it should not be allowed to overshadow India's indigenous languages.^{xvi}

Besides language he also promoted the use of Indian culture and traditions in public life. He believed that India's rich cultural heritage was a source of strength and pride and that it should be celebrated, preserved and made accessible to all sections of society, including marginalized communities.

12. CONCLUSION

Babu Jagjivan Ram's vision of a decolonized India had a profound and lasting impact on the country's post-independence development. His contributions to legal reforms, social justice, economic empowerment, and cultural revitalization helped shape the trajectory of modern India. While the process of decolonization is ongoing, Jagjivan Ram's efforts laid the foundation for a more just and equitable society. His legacy is reflected in the progressive laws, institutions, and social policies that continue to shape India today.

He understood that the removal of colonial symbols was essential for India's self-respect and for the creation of a new national identity that was inclusive, just, and rooted in the country's rich cultural heritage. In many ways, Jagjivan Ram's work remains unfinished, as the challenges of social inequality, cultural alienation, and economic dependence continue to confront India. However, his vision provides a roadmap for continuing the work of decolonization, ensuring that India's independence is fully realized in every aspect of national life. The legacy of Babu Jagjivan Ram is continued by the current governments in the forms of implementations of the New Education Policy, changing the symbols of the Indian Navy flag, renaming of cities, places, streets etc.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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